



Montana Department of
LABOR & INDUSTRY
Commissioner's Office

Contact: Casey Kyler-West, MDLI, 444-1520
Jan Begger, Passages, 294-9609



For Immediate Release

Tuesday, Aug. 14, 2012

Culinary arts program for female offenders receives national award

(Billings, MT) Second chances can be hard to come by, but for offenders at Passages Women's Center in Billings a second chance may also be a career.

A culinary arts apprenticeship program at the correctional facility offers women the opportunity to learn the skills needed to secure meaningful employment in the food service industry. The program is working so well that it is receiving national attention. The U.S. Department of Labor's Office of Apprenticeship has awarded Passages and its culinary arts pre-apprenticeship program the 2012 Trailblazer and Innovator Award. This award is given to programs that have "a significant impact on the history of registered apprenticeship in the 21st century."

"The pre-apprenticeship program at Passages is the first of its kind, and to see it receive this kind of national recognition is a tribute to the women who complete the program and the mentors who work with them," said Labor Commissioner Keith Kelly.

The program is a collaborative effort among the Montana Department of Labor and Industry's Apprenticeship and Training Program, the Department of Corrections and Alternatives Inc., which operates Passages under contract with the state. The program has specific requirements which must be met in order for participants to receive a completion certification. Participants must accrue a minimum of 2,000 hours of hands-on training in multiple experience areas of the food service industry and complete 280 hours of related coursework study related to the occupation.

Since it began two years ago, the program has had 13 graduates and the recidivism rate among those women is less than half of what it is for the overall female offender population. Almost all of the women completing the program have jobs and three-fourths of them are using the skills they learned to work in the food service industry. These results not only benefit public safety, but also represent a strong return on investment to employers and to Montana taxpayers by helping women avoid costly returns to prison.

"Recidivism reduction is one of the key elements of what we do in corrections," says Corrections Director Mike Ferriter. "The amazing outcomes of the participants in this program speak to the quality and value of this training program. I have always believed that developing vocational skills and meaningful employment opportunities are one of the main stepping stones for success, this project solidifies my belief."

(more)

“The culinary arts program at Passages is proving to be an effective bridge between prison and the community,” says Dave Armstrong, administrator of Alternatives. “Much of the success of our graduates is attributable to local groups such as the Billings Soroptomists, MSU Billings, Sysco (distributor of food service products), the Montana Chef’s and Cook’s Association, and the many employers who have embraced the program. Passages and the community working together provide the best opportunity for the successful re-entry of these graduates.”

The culinary arts program is a mixture of kitchen and classroom training for eight hours a day. Program participants work alongside and supplement the efforts of a food service operation that produces over 1,000 meals daily. Passages is a multi-part 164-bed facility for women offenders. It includes a prerelease center, an assessment, sanction and revocation center, and an alcohol and drug treatment center. The programs are part of Montana’s community corrections system and are designed to offer women alternatives to prison.

#####